

RHETORICAL AWARENESS OF STUDENT WRITERS AT AN HBCU: A STUDY OF REFLECTIVE RESPONSES IN THE WRITING CENTER

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Abstract

The recent call for replicable, aggregable, and data-driven (RAD) research of writing center effectiveness motivated this study. In writing centers, the primary objective is to improve writers through one-to-one conversations. Improvement in writers, defined here in terms of rhetorical awareness, has proven difficult to measure. In this article, the authors describe how they developed a scale to measure rhetorical awareness, specifically purpose, genre, and audience awareness. Using both discourse and content analyses, they applied the scale to student responses on reflection forms collected over two semesters at an HBCU to see if rhetorical awareness might be observable and measurable. Although the responses of students who visited the center more than once within six months did not show changes in their rhetorical awareness, as the authors had hoped, the results seem to reveal more about the social context than individual students, suggesting that current-traditional pedagogy persists. Aggregating data with this methodology may open new lines of inquiry for researchers of writing and allow them to track trends in discourse on writing.

Conversations with students who come to the writing center often begin with the question: “What brings you here today?” The response we hear all too often: “I need someone to proofread my paper before I turn it in.” As the conversation continues, we discover that students may still be working on trying to understand the assignment, trying to put their ideas together, articulate their thesis statement, find supporting evidence, or cite sources—in other words, anything but actual proofreading. The discrepancy between what students are working on at the moment and the words they use to describe it is striking. What is even more striking is students’ response when we begin to ask them why they are interested in their topic, who else might be interested in it, or what their purpose is. Some students seem baffled by the questions as though they did not expect someone to be genuinely interested in their writing. Some refuse to engage in conversation: “I just want you to read the paper to see if everything is correct,” they say. Our intentional appeal to students’ rhetorical awareness is often met with unintentional resistance.

Developing student rhetorical awareness has been a goal and a persistent challenge for writing center practitioners and instructors in the composition classroom since the “social turn” in the 1980s (see Gee, “New Literacy”). In the 1999 and 2014

Statement of Outcomes for First-Year Composition, the WPA Council asserts that developing rhetorical awareness in students is central to the work of composition. Understanding how students develop rhetorical awareness and authority has become increasingly important among growing digital communities with diverse audiences, genres, and modes of interaction. Meaningful conversations—with people whom we may never meet in person and who may come from backgrounds vastly different from our own—require particular habits of mind: the willingness and ability to listen, to reflect, and to empathize as well as a willingness to embrace uncertainty. For composition instructors and tutors of writing, this new learning environment requires a shift in pedagogy (Beetham and Sharpe “Introduction”; Sullivan) from teaching students to write correctly toward increasing their rhetorical awareness.

At our urban public HBCU in the Deep South, students who come to our writing center have a diverse range of writing experiences and abilities.¹ In our study, however, we discovered that, even at the graduate level, basic writing practices are prevalent. Here we define basic writing not by identity markers of writers but based on “disciplinary and pedagogical practices of basic writing” (Matsuda 84). Writing requirements on our campus focus on form and correctness, which echo current-traditional pedagogy. For example, the university catalog states that undergraduate and graduate students are required to take English proficiency exams “designed to show the strengths and weaknesses of each student in the areas of grammar and usage, logic, organization and content.” The undergraduate exam includes a five-paragraph essay, and the graduate exam consists of an objective grammar test and an essay. Although our university has a research rank, it does not have an established writing program, a vital component in the development of pedagogies and practices necessary to the work of composition instruction.

The focus on correctness is indicative of current traditional rhetoric (CTR) in writing instruction, and its pervasiveness at our HBCU is both troubling and surprising. In 1999 Sharon Crowley explains that “[b]y the end of the nineteenth century most popular

composition textbooks written in the vein now described as ‘current-traditional’ treat invention as a means of systematically delimiting an area of thought” (146), thereby preventing students from developing rhetorical authority as writers. In the wake of the social turn, Crowley called for a discourse that moves away from the “neat process formulas recommended by current-traditional textbooks for roping off a topic, stating a thesis, listing and developing (usually three) supporting ideas and repeating the thesis” (159). Also in 1999, in “History in the Spaces Left: African American Presence and Narratives of Composition Studies,” Jacqueline Jones Royster and Jean C. Williams describe how, since the nineteenth century, narratives in composition studies have excluded “suppressed groups, whether they intended it or not” (565) and called for the development of a critical interpretive “framework for resistance” (570-572, 582) to address the current-traditional pedagogy that perpetuates basic writing practices, which, unfortunately, remain in our present.

As we repeatedly respond to requests to help students proofread their papers, we strive to create a social context that emphasizes “intellectual engagement outside the classroom” (Our Mission). In the writing center, we train undergraduate and graduate tutors to engage students in conversations about their writing process in ways that position the students as writers, asking them about their audience, their purpose, genre conventions, and rhetorical choices they are in the process of making. In these conversations and by asking these kinds of questions, we want student-writers to experience social habits of mind associated with critical thinking, to practice new ways of thinking about their writing without anxiety or stigma associated with seeking feedback, and to increase their confidence in their ability to write and to learn. Outside the writing center, we also talk to students at orientations and in classes we visit, and we seek opportunities to speak with faculty in meetings and individually. On our campus, administrators and faculty acknowledge our efforts in the writing center, yet the center remains marginalized and described as a site of remediation, a sort of fix-it-shop—the result of a master narrative, Elizabeth Boquet suggests, that is “endemic to the institutional position of writing centers” (465).

At an HBCU, the narratives described by Royster and Williams and Boquet are troublesome as they serve to [re]produce and sustain “hegemonic institutional discourses” (Boquet 466). Boquet explains how, in the early 1980s, writing centers took a social turn by including peer tutors, not to change

what students learned but to change the “social context in which they [learned] it” (Bruffee qtd. in Boquet 474). In this turn, scholars described writing center practices and their inherent contradictions (477), within which issues of power came to the fore along with the potential for liberatory practices (476). In the ensuing decades, however, the South remained insular, as Royster and Williams note (566; also see Armstrong), and thus did not experience the social changes of the 1960s and ‘70s. For example, unlike the writing centers Boquet describes, our writing center, established in 2003 as a site of remediation, served to sustain current-traditional pedagogy and its mechanistic practices. Practices related to CTR, even inadvertently, sustain a deficit model that, without programmatic changes, can continue to cause harmful social, political, and cultural consequences (Royster and Williams 563, 566; also see Brannon, et al., and Hull, et al). Royster and Williams also argue for research methodologies designed “for seeing the gaps in our knowledge and generating the research that can help us to fill those gaps” (583), and we argue that our methodology has revealed consequences related to CTR at our HBCU, where ninety percent of faculty and students are African American. In that the data collected with our methodology suggests all students who used our center would be described as basic writers, we would argue that such data reveals more about the social and educational contexts of students than their individual abilities.

In our study, we wanted to explore the possibility that students’ rhetorical awareness and authority may develop because of conversations with writing center tutors. After each tutorial session, students reflect in writing on their conversation with a tutor. Therefore, we turned to reflection forms to see what students’ responses on the forms could reveal. Specifically we wanted to know 1) whether there is evidence that students think about their writing in terms of product or process, 2) what indications of purpose, genre, and audience we could observe, and 3) whether we could observe any changes in rhetorical awareness after repeat visits. We also wondered how we might describe our findings and represent them in measurable terms. Compelled by the call for data-supported evidence in our field (Babcock and Thonus; Driscoll and Perdue; Liggett, Jordan, and Price 56), we sought to answer these questions using a replicable, aggregable, and data-driven (RAD) approach to research.

Conversation in the Writing Center and Rhetorical Authority

Conversations with peer tutors are designed to help student writers negotiate their new academic audiences and develop rhetorical authority defined by Patricia Bizzell as “language use directed at a particular audience, for a particular purpose” (78) and as the ability to “recognize and incorporate into [one’s] persuasive arguments the values and circumstances of [one’s audience]” (292). In other words, one-to-one conversations with peer tutors can increase students’ rhetorical awareness and understanding of the writing process and thereby change writers in positive ways. In “Designing for Learning in an Uncertain Future,” Helen Beetham argues that for meaningful conversations to occur, students will not only have to use “existing social habits” but also learn that “academic/professional ways of making and maintaining contacts are different” (272). For basic writers and first-generation college students, whose *existing* social habits, habits of mind, and rhetorical practices may clash with those valued in academia, developing rhetorical awareness and authority may be particularly challenging. In *Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness*, Bizzell explains that in college, students encounter rhetorical problems that include a “clash of dialects” (165) between faculty and students, a “clash of discourse forms” (165) and conventions, and a “clash in the ways of thinking,” a cognitive problem that results from “differences in thinking” (167). Each of these problems may lower students’ confidence in their ability to learn (167) and increase resistance to writing and learning. When we hear self-deprecating comments by students—such as “I can’t talk right” or “I am a bad writer; I write the way I speak” or, when students bring papers with feedback from their instructors and say, “I don’t know what the teacher wants”—we hear evidence of lowered student confidence.

With an intentional focus on pedagogy that addresses rhetorical awareness, students might be empowered, begin to become “agents of their own learning” (Yancey 5). The changes we look for in student writers result from acts of communication in collaborative contexts, like writing centers.² In the writing center, peer conversations position tutors as real readers and provide a context in which writers might engage in conversations about their writing process and about the purpose and audience for their writing (see Redd and Slater). In *Classroom Discourse*, Courtney Cazden describes a similar process when she talks about students transforming “social interactions into internal speech” (131). Peer-to-peer conversations in the writing center provide a sort of “ritualized activity,” like “sharing time,” which, Cazden explains,

has four potential cognitive benefits: (a) “discourse as catalyst” for internal change, which may not (yet) be observable (127–128); (b) “discourse as the enactment of complementary roles,” during which “peers could perform tasks together before they could perform them alone” (129–130); (c) “discourse as relationship with an audience” (130–133); and (d) “discourse as exploratory talk” (133–134), which seems to be potentially the most observable. Through peer interaction, less experienced writers may develop the necessary social habits to which more experienced writers attend automatically (Beetham; Shaughnessy; Flower; Severino).

As basic writers experience feedback and reflection in contrast to instruction or correction, they become aware of their writing process, begin to think of themselves as writers, to develop rhetorical awareness. Increasing rhetorical awareness and authority may be revealed in the way students talk about their new academic community and “think about their own thoughts” when they question, compare experiences, and deliberate (Bizzell 170–173; also see Yancey), and engage a new dialect (Smitherman). Although Cazden reminds us that positive changes in students might not be immediately observable, we wanted to know what could be observed. Can we see evidence of exploratory talk, as Cazden suggests, and what can we learn from it?

Methodology

As Dana Driscoll and Sherry Wynn Perdue note, the challenge of RAD research in a writing center is rooted in the “uniqueness” of data collected in a particular center (121–123) and the “confusion about what replicability entails” (123). Of course each institutional context is unique, but problems students experience with writing for new audiences and how they develop rhetorical awareness are not necessarily unique to a particular site. The context of an HBCU isolates race—a significant social, political, and cultural factor—within an institution of higher education and thereby allows us to focus on how students talk about their writing, how writing is understood and practiced, and thereby how it is taught on our campus. Thus the replicability of our study does not rely on replicating the context or the results but on replicating the method we used to collect and analyze data (Smagorinsky; Driscoll and Perdue).

Instrument

As a regular practice in our center, we invite students to complete a reflection form at the end of each tutorial. For this study, the form served as a sort

of survey, which Neal Lerner explains is one of “the most common examples of methodological tools used to gather data that could be transformed into numbers but might still be part of a qualitative research project” (109). With the purpose of collecting data in a natural environment, we did not want to offer students incentives to fill out the form or explain the purpose of the form beyond our routine invitation to fill it out. Thus the form allowed us to collect responses focused on student writing while it also served the purpose of aggregating data.

The form contains four prompts that invite students to reflect on (a) why they came to the center, (b) what they talked about with the tutor, (c) what they will do next with their writing or speaking project, and (d) what stood out most to them during the tutorial session (see Appendix A). By encouraging students to reflect on their writing, their conversation with a tutor, and their writing process, and to imagine possibilities for completing the task before them, we were also engaging them in writerly behaviors that would allow them to exercise more rhetorical authority (Bizzell 168).

Data Collection and Analysis

From February to July 2014, we collected 354 forms from 268 students, undergraduate and graduate, and entered all responses into a table, which became our data set. The initial set of 354 forms was used to analyze whether students focused on product or process. Later, as we began the analysis of students’ rhetorical awareness, we found that the forms missing one or more responses did not provide necessary corroboration for interpretation of data. Thus we analyzed 293 forms for rhetorical awareness.

To analyze the data, we turned to discourse analysis to observe writers’ “language in use” (Gee 1) and to content analysis to “produce counts of key categories” (Neuendorf 14) and to “identify units of content” that may signal focus on product or process and may indicate rhetorical awareness (Bowen and Bowen 691). In *How to Do Discourse Analysis*, James Gee explains that discourse analysis is “a collaborative, social endeavor” (5), like writing center work itself. Discourse analysis helped us look closely at “the details of language structure,” e.g., nouns and verbs, and more broadly at “social, cultural, and political” contexts (Gee 1), providing a “path to understanding” (2) how students make meaning out of, or internalize, their experience (also see Cazden). We inquired, for example, how students expressed in writing what was important to them as writers and what they took away from a conversation with a tutor. We examined the

vocabulary students used and how each word suggested, for example, different ways students “build and sustain or change relationships” (Gee 202) with an audience, and we considered what their focus might tell us about the social context and its “Discourse” (181–186, 204).

To explore whether students described their writing as product or process, we noted whether students used nouns or verbs to reflect on their writing and the tutorial. Nouns name objects and concepts, while verbs describe actions and processes, so if students used nouns when reflecting on their writing (e.g., “I came to work on grammar”), they might be focusing on the product of writing. In contrast, when they used verbs (e.g., “I came to work on citing sources”), they were more likely to be focusing on the process. Then we counted and categorized nouns and verbs related to the product and process of writing, noting how responses changed from Prompt 1 to Prompt 4. We also counted the number of times each noun and verb was used and the different nouns and verbs used in response to each of the four prompts.

In an attempt to measure writer’s rhetorical awareness, we looked for markers of writers’ “sense of authority” (Kirsch 81), considering what we might hear from “experienced” and “novice” writers (Flower et al.) when they reflect on their writing. For example, experienced writers might assert their communicative purpose, connect their purpose to the needs of an audience, and indicate how a particular genre helps them to achieve their purpose. They also may demonstrate rhetorical authority by explaining their choices, which also points toward abilities related to metacognition and reflection. In contrast, novice writers, as responses in our data set demonstrated, may refer to a writing process (e.g., organize my essay), mention an interdisciplinary genre (e.g., research paper, article critique), or mention a general “reader” or “audience,” but do not connect them or explain how they inform rhetorical choices. With this variation of responses in mind, we developed magnitude codes (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 80), which ranged from no indication of awareness (1) to strong/clear indication of awareness (5). (See the codes and their description in Appendix B.)

Following the advice of William Bowen and Chieh-Chen Bowen to increase the “possibility of replication” (695), we trained each other as coders and coded independently. Then we invited three outside coders to code 20% of data selected randomly and trained them in the process. These strategies also served the purpose of triangulation. In instances of

disagreement, we compared the codes looking for possible explanations for disagreements and adjusted our code descriptions and coding process. As Peter Smagorinsky advises, we reached agreement through a “thoughtful exchange about what to call each and every data segment” (402), and in the process, we gained a richer understanding of what we were observing. Our goal was to reach 0.70 reliability, which is acceptable for exploratory research like ours (Neuerndorf). Reliability was measured using Cohen’s Kappa (k) coefficient. After twelve cycles of revising the coding scheme, we achieved 0.785 reliability for purpose; 0.885 for genre; and 0.964 for audience. We then reviewed the coded responses from the 44 students who visited the center twice or more to see how they indicated their rhetorical awareness and authority from one session to another.

Findings

What Writers Focus On

When we began counting the number of nouns and verbs, we noticed that Prompts 1 and 3 seemed to draw attention to product, and Prompts 2 and 4 seemed to draw attention to process. Thus the prompts themselves seemed to shift students’ focus from product to process, with more nouns used in response to Prompts 1 and 3, and more verbs used in response to Prompts 2 and 4.

The analysis of the initial set of 354 reflection forms revealed that in 134 responses (38%), students focused on grammar and correctness. Responses to Prompt 1 included 327 nouns, more than 99% of responses, and 21 verbs, less than 1%. In Prompt 4, however, verbs comprised 94% of responses. From Prompt 1 to 3, nouns decreased by 30%, and from Prompt 2 to 4, verbs increased by 35%. The number of blanks also increased from Prompt 1 to Prompt 4, so percentages rather than numbers more accurately represent any differences (see Fig. 1 in Appendix C).

The vocabulary students used to describe their writing became more specific from Prompt 1 to Prompt 4, which may be evidence of exploratory talk. Nouns used in Prompt 1 were vague “paper” or “essay,” and nouns in response to Prompt 3 were more specific, e.g., “my introduction” or “the body of my research paper.” Similarly, the variety of verbs used increased. For example, of the 194 verbs used in response to Prompt 2, 43 different verbs were used. However, of the 228 verbs in response to Prompt 4, 87 different verbs were used. Overall, the increase in variety of nouns and verbs may also be evidence of students making sense of their experience, a metacognitive activity that reflection invites.

Rhetorical Awareness: Purpose, Genre, and Audience

Table C1 (See Appendix C) summarizes how many students indicated rhetorical awareness of purpose, genre, and audience from none (1) to strong (5).

Purpose

None of the responses suggested a focus on exploring an issue, an intention to convince an audience, or an explanation of a rhetorical choice that would indicate a strong sense or awareness of purpose in writing. In only 1% of responses writers expressed an intention to “grab” or “keep” the reader’s attention, thus implying the purpose to affect an audience. In 7% of responses, writers only mentioned grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, and changes or corrections at the sentence level. In 15% of responses, writers mentioned academic conventions, such as format, citations, reference pages, and referred to changes or corrections in those areas. In 77% of responses, writers referred to a writing process (often vaguely), parts of a paper, or learning and writing strategies, sometimes mentioning ideas (see examples in Table B1 in Appendix B).

Genre

None of the responses referred to a communicative purpose of a genre or indicated how a genre might relate to an audience. Only in 6% of responses, writers mentioned a genre specific to an academic field (e.g., philosophy of education), qualified a genre by a field or a discipline, or referred to qualities or components of an academic genre (for additional examples, see Table B2). In 23% of responses, writers noted a cross-disciplinary academic genre (e.g., research paper). In 31% of responses, writers either did not name the product of writing or named it in a generalized way. Some defined a product by topic. In 40% of responses, students mentioned a product of writing (e.g., paper) qualified by discipline, course, mode of organization, or by instructor, or mentioned a non-academic genre (e.g., résumé). In these responses students also referred to features of an academic genre, such as citations.

Audience

In contrast to genre awareness, there was little variation in how students demonstrated audience awareness. An overwhelming 95% of responses did not mention an audience and included first person pronouns, e.g., “I” and “my” (see Table B3). In 3% of responses, writers mentioned an instructor as an

intended audience. A general “audience” or “reader” was mentioned in 1% of responses, and a specific audience was mentioned only in one response. None of the responses mentioned needs of an audience or connected those to the purpose of writing.

Changes in Writers Who Visited More than Once

Of the 44 students who came to the center more than once, 33 completed two reflection forms, 7 completed three forms, 2 completed four forms, and 2 completed six and seven forms each, totaling 108 responses analyzed. Despite our expectation that we would see consistent positive changes in their rhetorical awareness, 50% of responses showed no change; the other 50% showed an inconsistent change, such as a decrease in one category but increase in another. The number of times students visited the center did not make a meaningful difference in how they described their writing.

Corollary finding

While we observed no consistent changes in rhetorical awareness in writers who visited our center, one finding suggests that conversation with tutors motivated writers to rethink current habits and practices. In 13% of responses to Prompt 4, students made resolutions that extended beyond completing the task at hand and referred to social practices and habits of mind valued in academic communities, for example:

- reading—e.g., “reading the whole story,” “referring back to writing styles that the social work department gave out”;
- engagement with the learning and writing processes—e.g., “participate more in class,” “write a few pages more than required”; and
- “writerly” habits—e.g., “writing every day,” “make necessary revisions on my own,” “come back to the writing center.”

A few students expressed the need for “rereading” the assignment, and one graduate student noted that she would be “reevaluating” her previous knowledge and what she wanted to learn. In other words, the act of reflection prompted some students to rethink their habits, and their responses may indicate decreasing resistance to reading, writing, and possibly to learning while also suggesting a growing confidence in their abilities to learn. If these were “reluctant writers” (Harris 23–33), then in conversation with tutors they might have enacted “complementary roles” (Cazden 129–130) that enabled them to experience, in positive ways, practices they had resisted. As many students

said, the tutor really helped them understand whatever they needed at that moment.

Discussion

In our study, we attempted to observe the rhetorical awareness of students as they reflected on their writing and conversation with a tutor. Overall, our findings suggest that students focused on the writing process more than we had expected and on rhetorical problems less than we had hoped. The vocabulary students used was general and vague, and most often they focused on completing the task correctly, which may reflect their previous experiences with writing. Genre awareness had the widest range of responses, which suggests an emphasis on product. In response to Prompt 1, we found that from the vocabulary we could identify where students were in their academic careers, from early undergraduate to graduate level. As students responded to each prompt, their focus seemed to shift from the product to the process of writing, and their language became more exploratory (Cazden 133–134). Most novice writers learning to write for new audiences in new genres tend to focus on the product. They do not yet have the vocabulary to externalize their thoughts about writing or their purpose for writing in the way more experienced writers do (see Carroll; Wong). While reading student responses, we noticed that each writer came to the center at a different stage of the writing process and for a different reason, so it was difficult to determine what “purpose” we were seeing, but it seemed more connected to completing a task than exploring or communicating ideas.

The focus on correctness that we observed is not necessarily surprising or unique to our institution, particularly for basic or novice writers, who may have experienced CTR in prior education settings. In “The Language of Exclusion,” Mike Rose describes how nineteenth-century prescriptive methods of teaching grammar shaped twentieth-century writing pedagogy with the focus on error as indicator of a writer’s ability or inability—methods, he argues earlier in *Lives on the Boundary*, that are “reductive” and “keep students from becoming fully, richly literate” (his emphasis, 210–211). At an HBCU, the focus of faculty on correctness suggests that vestiges of current-traditional pedagogy remain in our present, and arguments made by faculty that students “need” to speak and write correctly to get jobs may reveal experiences of stigmatization and marginalization related to African American Vernacular English (AAVE/AAE) in public, professional, and educational spheres (see Alim and Smitherman 189–191). By stressing one standard of

correctness, however, faculty sustain, albeit unintentionally, pedagogies that marginalize students.³

In academic contexts, students experience differences beyond grammar that point toward rhetorical problems, as well as toward social issues related to class and race—issues that need to be addressed both inside and outside the writing center (e.g., Crowley; Royster and Williams; Shaughnessy; Maimon; Kirsch; Flower; Severino; Smitherman). The clashes between rhetorical strategies in and outside educational contexts were explored in the 1980s and '90s by Shirley Brice Heath and many others (see Hull and Rose; Ladson-Billings; Ogbu, "Literacy"; Redd and Slater; Villanueva), providing evidence of the social turn in composition studies. Critical interpretive frames ground research historically, Royster and Williams, Ogbu ("Adaptation") and others argue, and focus on the social context to see gaps in knowledge and generate research to fill gaps that reveal the need for critical pedagogies.

In our study, we found that most students remained focused on "what the teacher wants" (Bizzell 167), which is common among basic writers. The expectation for these writers to conform their writing and thinking to academic discourse often considered white and elitist outside academia may result in lowered confidence (Bizzell 167) and increased resistance (see Young et al. 67–69), not only to coming to the writing center but to writing (see Rose, cited in Bizzell 193–94), if not also to learning (167). Bizzell explains that students entering an academic discourse community new to them are, in a sense, becoming "bicultural" (169),⁴ which may cause "resistance" (168). African American students in particular, Vershawn Young explains in *Your Average Nigga*, may resist behaviors indicative of intellectual pursuits and essential to success in college because this behavior is perceived as "acting white,"⁵ and for males as less than masculine. As our findings suggest, conversations in the writing center may help students re-evaluate these habits and lessen resistance to academic literacy in ways that may empower them (also see Morrell).

Over the course of our six-month study, we did not find evidence that repeat visits made a difference in students' rhetorical awareness. Although talking to a tutor about writing and then reflecting on it might have provided a platform for change, we realize that the learning process takes longer than the six months of this study. Studies that span several semesters might be necessary to track changes in individual students that may have been taking place internally, as Cazden and Gee suggest. Two longitudinal studies offer

convincing evidence of the value of longer studies: Marilyn Sternglass's *Time to Know Them* and Lee Ann Carroll's *Rehearsing New Roles*. Both studies, however, are small scale (9 and 20 students, respectively) and thus offer limited possibilities for aggregation or quantification necessary for tracking trends. Since we completed our initial study in 2014, we have continued to collect data that now spans four academic years and may provide more information on students' rhetorical awareness and on how students see themselves as writers. With no changes in the way writing has been taught on campus since we began the collection of data, changes in how students describe their writing might then be attributed to their experiences in the writing center.

Limitations

During our study, three limitations emerged. As mentioned earlier, we paid attention to how students used nouns and verbs on the reflection form to describe their writing, quickly realizing that the number of nouns and verbs elicited could have resulted from how we had worded the four prompts. This limitation may be minimized by rewording the prompts or framing them as questions. For example, instead of using the prompt "I came to work on . . ." we could ask an open-ended question: "What brought you to the writing center?"

The second limitation also relates to the instrument for collecting data but at the point of collection. For example, some students explained, as they handed the form to us at the end of the session, that they were in a hurry, on their way to class or work, and had no time to complete the form. This may indicate that the tutor and writer had not set an agenda for the session that included the form, or that the writer did not yet recognize the value of reflection, as the increasing number of blanks and stock phrases used on response forms also suggests. In addition, repeat visits occurred within a short period, from one day to one month between visits, which may also account for the increasing number of blanks and stock phrases. Students who came to the center in quick succession were often working on the same project and therefore might have felt overburdened by having to complete the form again.

The third limitation relates to time and methodology. While the data collection form aligns with writing center values and allows for aggregation of data, the six months of our study did not allow time to collect enough data for conclusive evidence. For shorter studies, it may serve to collect data to answer a different set of research questions or for purposes of

triangulation alongside qualitative instruments, such as interviews with students.

Implications

While we found little evidence of rhetorical awareness in student responses and no evidence that it had increased with repeat visits to the writing center, we did observe that most writers at our HBCU struggled to describe their writing. Thus students need opportunities to reflect and to develop metacognitive and metalinguistic abilities through meaningful conversations about their ideas and their writing process, not just on format and correctness, and not just in writing centers. In these conversations, students also need to reflect on similarities and differences between their home language or dialect and that of each new discourse community they join, thereby developing new habits of mind and the flexibility necessary for meaningful interaction across discourse communities (see Matsuda; Beetham “Designing Learning”; Blankenship and Jory; Stanford). Graduate and undergraduate tutors, as students, also benefit from opportunities for reflection when they take the tutor training course and in their everyday writing and tutoring practices. On the back of the student reflection form, for example, tutors are also invited to reflect on the session, a source of aggregable data for another study.

Our study suggests that the way students describe their writing may have implications for the teaching of writing and for rethinking what we might ask as researchers. For example, with evidence of current-traditional pedagogy that dominated the early part of the twentieth century, on our campus we might argue more compellingly for a strong writing program and professional development to redress entrenched values and attitudes about writing (see Thomas). With the aggregation of data, as researchers we can reimagine what we might learn: Could we observe changes in the teaching of writing on campus, across the state, and in the field more broadly? Could changes in students’ descriptions of writing serve as indirect indicators of changes in the curricula, pedagogy, or teaching materials? What results might we see if the study were replicated in HBCUs, in comparable research institutions, predominantly white institutions, tribal colleges, women’s colleges, community colleges, colleges with and without strong writing programs?

Replication of this study might also allow us to identify and track trends in how students transition from novice to experienced writers, acquire rhetorical awareness and authority, and engage in reflective

practices across contexts. With aggregation of data, we may also be able to develop new theories and new teaching and tutoring practices to intervene positively in student learning.

Notes

1. Annually, our writing center staff meet with 4% of student population; 70% of visitors are freshmen and 12%, graduate students.
2. See Bruffee. Also, on the value of talking about writing, see Mortensen.
3. See Ogbu; Bartholomae; Hull and Rose; Ladson-Billings; Durst; Redd; Young, *Your Average*, “Keep Code-meshing,” “Should Writers”; Alim and Smitherman.
4. When applied to African American students, the concept of “bicultural” may be comparable to the concept of “dual citizenship” described by Signithia Fordham.
5. On the “burden of ‘acting white,’” see Fordham. Also, in July 2014, President Obama addressed the issue of acting white:

This is true not just for Native Americans, but it’s also true for African Americans. Sometimes African Americans, in communities where I’ve worked, there’s been the notion of ‘acting white’—which sometimes is overstated, but there’s an element of truth to it, where, okay, if boys are reading too much, then, well, why are you doing that? Or why are you speaking so properly? And the notion that there’s some authentic way of being black, that if you’re going to be black you have to act a certain way and wear a certain kind of clothes, that has to go. (Applause.) Because there are a whole bunch of different ways for African American men to be authentic. (The White House)

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Appendix A

Student Reflection Form

Student Name: _____

Date: _____

Tutor Who Assisted You: _____

1. I came to work on _____

2. The tutor helped me _____

3. I will leave being able to work on _____

4. I will begin by _____

and may also _____

Appendix B

Coding Scheme

Table B1
Purpose

Code	1	2	3	4	5
Description	-Writer mentions grammar, punctuation -mentions changes in sentence structure, grammar, wording -mentions corrections	-Writer mentions academic conventions such as format, citations, reference page -mentions changes, corrections related to format	-Writer refers (often vaguely) to writing process, parts of paper, or learning and writing strategies -mentions ideas -may also mention grammar and conventions	-Writer mentions exploring a topic and/or conveying an idea -mentions making connections between ideas -mentions affecting an audience	-Writer asserts a communicative purpose -identifies and/or explains a rhetorical choice
Examples	"with grammar"; "correct my grammar" "verify my grammar mistakes" "correct my punctuation"	"correctly write an APA style paper and reference page" "format my essay" "cite sources as well as format my paper" "make more corrections to my [work cited] page"	"understand what a thesis statement is /understand analysis" "organize my essay" "come up with a great starting structure for my paper and working with topic to include and points to discuss" "to create an effective outline" "understand and correct my essay" "get my ideas together to form my essay" "editing my paper" "proofreading my work"	"grab the reader's attention earlier" "to keep my audience's attention"	None identified

Table B2
Genre

Code	1	2	3	4	5
Description	-Writer doesn't name a product of writing -names a product in a generalized way -defines a product by topic	-Writer qualifies product by discipline, course, mode of organization, or instructor -refers to features of academic writing, such as citations -mentions a non-academic genre	Writer notes an interdisciplinary academic genre	-Writer identifies a genre specific to a field or qualifies genre by field/discipline -refers to qualities or components of an academic genre	-Writer indicates how the genre relates to purpose and/or audience -refers to the communicative purpose of a genre
Examples	"my grammar" "a paper" "essay" "paragraph" "my final paper, portfolio and PowerPoint presentation"	"a paragraph for Mrs. Wren" "my psychology paper" "my extended definition paper for English Comp I" "my psychology paper which was on Acrophobia" "my writing process paper that Dr. Griffin assigned" "resume"	"research paper" "scholarship essay" "annotated bibliography" "article critique"	"my philosophy of education" "my literary analysis for English Composition and Literature" "quantitative research paper" "abstract"	None identified

Table B3
Audience

Code	1	2	3	4	5
Description	-Writer uses 1 st person -doesn't mention an audience	Writer mentions instructor as intended reader only	Writer mentions a general "audience" or "reader"	-Writer identifies specific intended audience -shows awareness of the audience's needs, knowledge of the topic, etc.	-Writer connects awareness of audience's needs with purpose
Examples	"I came to work on my essay for class" "my paper"	"Research paper for Dr. Lee"	"consider or reconsider my intended audience" "start thinking about the reader when I write" "...rewrite the introduction to my paper to grab the attention of my reader" "presenting it to the class"	"manuscript for a medical journal"	None identified

Appendix C

Fig. 1

Percentage of Nouns and Verbs Used by Students on Reflection Forms

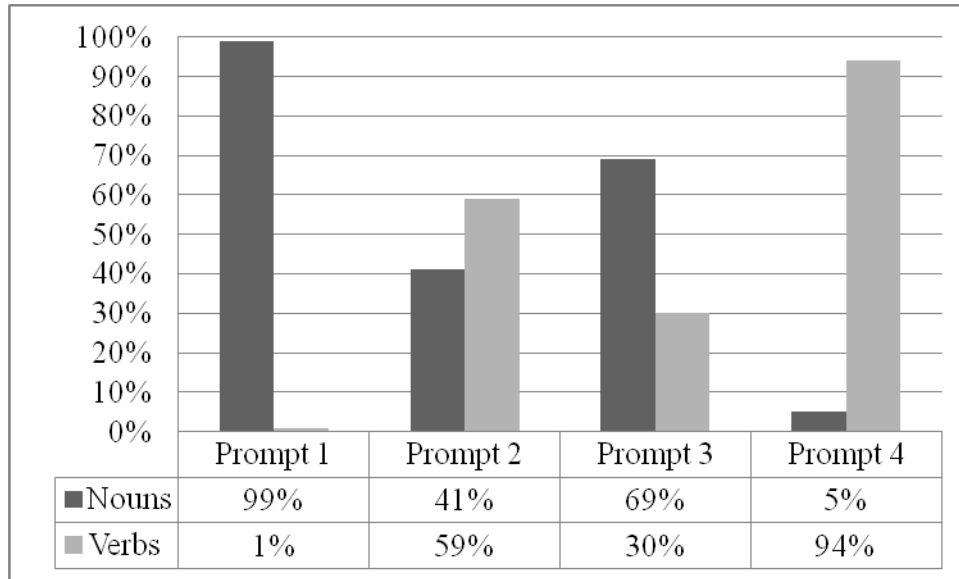


Table C1

Percentage of Students Indicating Rhetorical Awareness

Category	Scale				
	1	2	3	4	5
Purpose	7	15	77	1	0
Genre	31	40	23	6	0
Audience	95	3	1	1	0